

ROBERT
CUNNINGHAM.

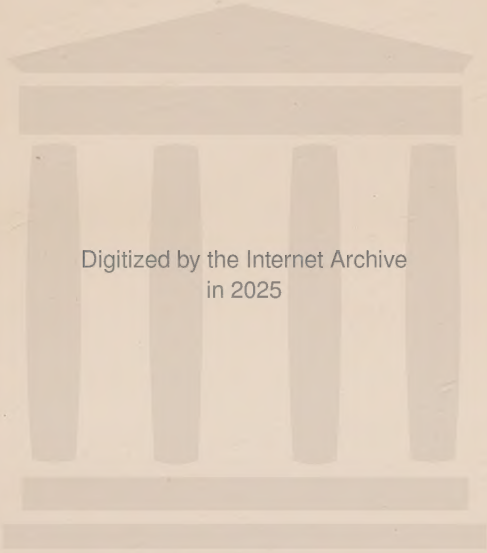
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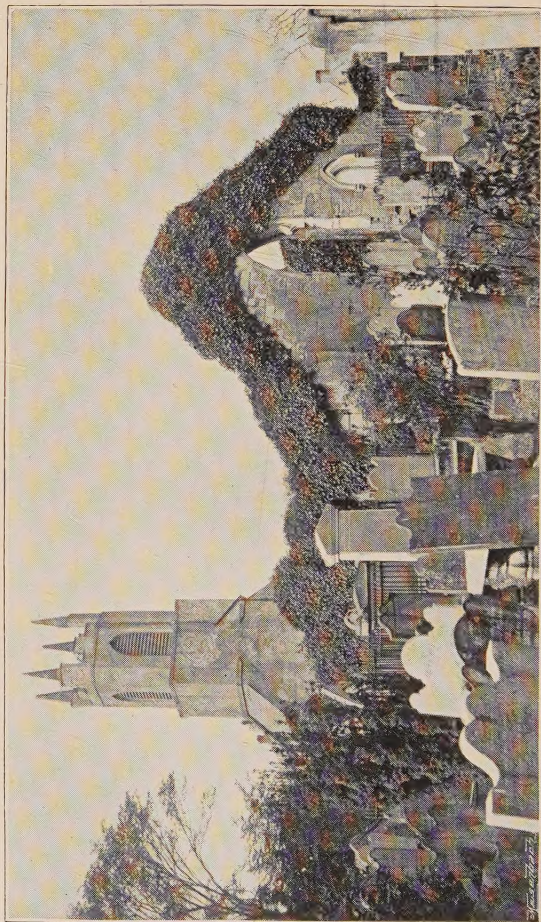
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AN ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE
OF
ROBERT CUNNINGHAM



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THE OLD CHURCH, HOLYWOOD,
WHERE ROBERT CUNNINGHAM MINISTERED.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE
OF
ROBERT CUNNINGHAM, A.M.,

MINISTER OF HOLYWOOD IN IRELAND, 1615—1636.

BY
CLEMENT EDWARDS PIKE,
FELLOW OF THE ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF RELIGION IN IRELAND."

"He was the one man to my discerning, of all that ever I
saw, who resembled most the meekness of Jesus
Christ in all his whole carriage."

—JOHN LIVINGSTONE.

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NOTE.

THE substance of this little volume was delivered as a Lecture in the Schoolroom of the First Presbyterian Congregation, Hollywood, a congregation which derives its foundation from the labours of Robert Cunningham, and which since a few years after his death has existed as an organised society.

In compiling this, the only record of Cunningham's life, I have drawn the facts mainly from the following works:—"Autobiography and Life of Robert Blair"; "Memorable Characteristics and Remarkable Passages of Divine Providence, &c.," collected by Mr. John Livingstone; "The Life of John Livingstone," contained in "Select Biographies"; which are all published by the Wodrow Society. "The Hamilton Manuscripts," edited by T. K. Lowry, Esq., LL.D.; "The Montgomery Manuscripts"; and "The Plantation of Ulster,"

edited by Rev. George Hill ; "The Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Down, Connor and Dromore," edited by Dr. Reeves ; "Reid's History of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland"; "A True Narrative of the Rise and Progress of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland," by Rev. Patrick Adair ; and "History of the Church of Ireland," by Rev. Andrew Stewart, edited by Dr. Killen.



Holywood in the time of Robert Cunningham.
From a Survey made in 1623.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE
OF
ROBERT CUNNINGHAM.

NEARLY all that is known of the life of Robert Cunningham is obtained from the writings of men more famous than himself, upon whom his character made a deep impression. In order to place the facts before our readers it will be necessary to call these men as witnesses, and to briefly introduce them.

The first witness we shall call bears the honoured name of Livingstone, a name famous in Scotland and in the North of Ireland long before the great African Explorer made it renowned throughout the world.

John Livingstone was born on the 21st June or January, 1603, at Kilsyth in Stirlingshire, where his father was minister. Having graduated at Glasgow in 1621, he decided to enter the ministry, and for two years acted as chaplain to the Earl of Wigton. He became known as a very impressive preacher, but his fervent antiprelatical principles made him

obnoxious to the Bishops, and prevented him from obtaining a parish in Scotland. He appears to have been acquainted with Robert Cunningham at this time for he tells us—"In the Summer, 1630, being in Irvine, Mr. Robert Cunningham, Minister at Holywood, and some while before that, Mr. George Dunbar, Minister at Larne in Ireland, proponed to me, seeing there was no appearance I could enter into the ministry in Scotland, whether or not I would be content to go to Ireland? I answered them both, if I got a clear call and a free entry, I would not refuse. About August, 1630, I got letters from the Viscount Clannybuie to come to Ireland, in reference to a call to Killinshie whither I went, and got an very unanimous call from the paroch."¹

He then explains how his "free entry" was managed. The Bishop of Down, Echlin, is described as one who would have required from him "some engagement" he, "being a corrupt, humorous man." In a note on this phrase Dr. Reid says that humorous is changed to timorous in the edition of 1727, and he adds—"which is evidently a more correct and appropriate epithet than 'humorous.'" More correct and appropriate perhaps

¹ *Life of Livingstone*, pp. 140—1.

if we give to the word its modern signification; but not if we mean by it what it commonly meant in Livingstone's age. To be "humorous" then, meant to be capricious and uncertain, and this is the sense in which Livingstone probably applied it, and very correctly, as events will show, to the character of Echlin, Bishop of Down.

Echlin being regarded as a "humorous" man, though no joker, application was made to Andrew Knox, Bishop of Rapho. Knox, according to Livingstone, was exceedingly compliant. It is possible that the letters Livingstone delivered from "My Lord Clanniboy, and from the Earl of Wigton, and some others," may have contributed to this effect. Be that as it may, no difficulties were put in the way.

The ordination ceremony, like several others that occurred at this period, was so managed as to satisfy both Episcopal and Presbyterian requirements. Having thus secured a settlement in Ireland, as Minister of Killinchy, Livingstone had opportunity to improve his acquaintanceship with Robert Cunningham who, as we have seen, had advised him to come to Ireland. The result of his observations is contained in a short work of his called—"Memorable Character-

istics and Remarkable Passages of Divine Providence exemplified in the lives of some of the most eminent ministers and professors in the Church of Scotland." In this brief narrative we find that wonderful eulogy of the character of Cunningham, a portion of which is quoted in the title page of this book. But the sentence before this is interesting as it contains the only record we have of Cunningham's life before he arrived in Ireland.

"Mr. Robert Cunningham was at first preacher for awhile to the Earle of Buccleugh's regiment in Holland, but thereafter Minister at Holywood, in the North of Ireland, where he had been considerable tyme before Mr. Blair came to Bangor."¹

How long Cunningham remained in Holland, or when he went there we have no record. On April 9th, 1609, an armistice had been arranged between Holland and Spain, which lasted for twelve years, he therefore probably saw no fighting there; but he would hear much of the great struggle which had been waged so long and so gallantly with the greatest power in Europe.

Since the days of Queen Elizabeth, three Dutch towns, Rammekens, Flushing, and

¹ Memorable Characteristics, &c, p. 325.

Brill had been held by the English as security for money advanced to the Dutch Government, and the regiment to which Cunningham acted as preacher may have been stationed at one of these towns. A residence in Holland at this period must have afforded valuable opportunities for observation and study. "Holland"—it has been said—"was the printing house of Europe." The air was full of theological controversy. Arminius from his chair of theology in the University of Leyden, had dared to challenge the rigid system of John Calvin, and to contend that man's will is free. Though in 1609 he had passed away, his followers who were called Remonstrants spread his doctrines far and wide. This keen theological strife was waged in a country which had distanced all the rest of Europe in Art, Science, Scholarship, Agriculture, and Commerce. How great must have been the contrast between this brilliant civilisation and the state of the North of Ireland when in the year 1615 Robert Cunningham wended his way thither !

That great experiment in colonization known as the Plantation of Ulster had only recently been made. On the 3rd of September, 1607, the two northern Earls, the Earl of Tyrconnell and the Earl of Tyrone,

had sailed away from Lough Swilly, never to return. After their flight they were outlawed and their lands, escheated to the crown, "were soon made available for plantation purposes."¹ Vast additions were subsequently made to the broad lands thus unjustly confiscated, and it was not till 1611 that the colonists began to arrive, the natives having been permitted to remain until May of that year. A few years before this occurred, large tracts of land in Down and Antrim had been colonised by James Hamilton and Hugh Montgomery. It will thus be apparent that when Cunningham arrived the greater part of Ulster was a new colony. There were few families of old standing, and fresh emigrants were constantly arriving. The character of the new settlement has been described by Andrew Stewart, Minister of Donaghadee, in a fragment called "History of the Church of Ireland after the Scots were naturalized." Having been born and bred in the colony Stewart could speak from experience, and dark as his picture is, it is probably a true one.

"Whereas I said before, King James had prepared a place and liberty in Ireland for them," (the Scots) "and having given some

¹ The Plantation in Ulster, by Rev. George Hill, p. 59.

lands to some men whom he had nobilitated, these men sought tenants for their lands, and from Scotland came many, and from England not a few, yet all of them generally the scum of both nations, who, for debt, or breaking and fleeing from justice, or seeking shelter, came hither, hoping to be without fear of man's justice in a land where there was nothing, or but little, as yet, of the fear of God. And in few years there flocked such a multitude of people from Scotland that these northern counties of Down, Antrim, Londonderry, &c., were in a good measure planted, which had been waste before; yet most of the people, as I said before, made up a body (and it's strange, of different names, nations, dialects, tempers, breeding, and, in a word, all void of godliness) who seemed rather to flee from God in this enterprise than to follow their own mercy."¹

The same writer tells us that "iniquity abounded, contention, fighting, murder, thieving, adultery, &c." Again he says—"their carriage made them to be abhorred at home in their native land, insomuch that going for Ireland was looked on as a miserable mark of

¹ Stewart's History appended to Adair's Narrative, &c., edited by Killen, pp. 313, 314,

a deplorable person—yea, it was turned to a proverb, and one of the expressions of disdain that could be invented to tell a man that Ireland would be his hinder end.”¹

Ulster must have had its full share of the vices of a new community, and the ecclesiastical efforts to restrain these excesses do not appear to have been very adequate. The diocese of Down which had remained without a chapter since the Reformation obtained one from James I. in 1609. John Gibson was then created “Dean of the Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity of Down,” and certain other dignitaries and prebends, with accompanying benefices, were allotted.²

As the majority of the settlers were from Scotland it was the policy of James to appoint Scotchmen to the Northern Sees. John Tod was succeeded by James Dundas, a Scotchman, in 1612, and he, dying soon after, was followed by another Scotchman Robert Echlin, in 1613.

The ruined cathedral with its brand new chapter was typical of the state of Ulster at this time. Old and new faiths, old and new fashions were constantly clashing. Instead of

¹ Stewart's History appended to Adair's Narrative, &c., edited by Killen, p. 315.

² Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Down, Connor and Dro-more, by Rev. William Reeves, &c.

penetrating the primeval forest, or surveying the lonely prairie these sturdy dissolute colonists were settling in a country which had been civilized when their ancestors were savages. Reformed Episcopalianism had no influence on the native Irish, and it was repugnant to the Scotch settlers, who, "though"—as Stewart puts it—"they cared little what profession was uppermost yet thought it a scorn to be hurled against their own will into a sudden change of what they had been bred to ; and, therefore, though they had not the feeling of things from any principle of grace in their hearts, yet the very pride of their heart, and a sort of nationality biassed them to scorn conforming, though they joined with it, because it was the King's will and the law of the land."¹

The result of this temper in the greater number of settlers was a curious amalgam of Episcopalianism and Presbyterianism, and Bishops like Echlin showed great dexterity in both satisfying the law and public opinion.

This then was the condition of Ulster when Robert Cunningham arrived in 1615.

From a list of the clergy of Down and Connor made in 1633 it appears that Cuning-

¹ Stewart's History appended to Adair, &c., 314, 315.

ham was ordained on the 9th of November, 1615. In an earlier document, the "Ulster Visitation Book" for the year 1622, preserved among the MSS. in Trinity College, Dublin, and printed as an Appendix in Dr. Reid's work, will be found the following entry :—

PARISHES.	MINISTERS.	OBSERVATIONS.
Cregyvad & Hollywood.	Robert Cunningham, A.M.	Resident at Hollywood — serveth these cures and maintained by a stipend from Sir James Hamilton — church repaired in part.

Only one church is referred to, and this would doubtless be Holywood. There had been a church at Craigavad. In the "Inquisition" taken at Downpatrick on October 13th, 1623, it is thus referred to—"And we find also the church or chapell of Cregavada to be a chapell of ease belonging to the said abbey of Bangor."¹ This building has been completely removed. When Dr. Reeves visited it, many years ago, one solitary tombstone remained, but even this has now vanished. Dr. Reeves thus describes the place—"Cragger—now Craigavad (the rock of the boat), a townland in the north

¹ Hamilton MSS., Appendix, p. xxxi.

part of Hollywood parish, and bordering on Belfast Lough.—At the Dissolution, this church, with the tithes of five adjacent townlands, was appropriate to the Abbey of Bangor. The foundations of the church, measuring about 48 by 18 feet, still remain in a rocky field which lies between Craigavad House and the Lough, and beside them stands a solitary tombstone sacred to the memory of James M'Gee, who died in 1714.”¹

So Dr. Reeves describes Craigavad. We cannot do better than consult the same learned antiquary about the other cure which was served by Robert Cunningham, viz., Holywood.

“Haliwode, now Hollywood Parish—The ancient church, which is a building of great age, measuring 78 by 24 feet, was used till lately for divine worship. Instead of the English name the form Sanctus Boscus is sometimes met with. A.D. 1210, July 29th, King John halted ‘apud Sanctum Boscum’ when on his way from Carrickfergus to Downpatrick. A.D. 1217, Jordanus de Sankeville was confirmed by Henry III. in the possession of his lands ‘de Sancto Bosco’—At the Dissolution a small religious house of the third

¹ Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Down, Connor and Dro-more, p. 13, note.

order of Saint Francis existed here ; it was dependent on the Franciscan Abbey of Bangor and was endowed with five townlands." ¹

This was the Parish to which Robert Cunningham ministered. These were the cures he served. In the small ancient church, only "partly repaired," of Holywood, he preached and conducted the service for many quiet years of unmolested peace.

And now let us glance at his patron, the man who paid his stipend, and who had given him the living, Sir James Hamilton, afterwards (in 1622) created Viscount Claneboye. At Clandeboye, the home of the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, there is a fine portrait of the first Lord Claneboye. His aspect and dress are both somewhat sombre, and contrast with the grace and vivacity depicted in the portraits of the Sheridans. The face expresses deep thought. It is the face of one who was both a scholar and a man of affairs. James Hamilton was a very learned man, and also a man of great practical ability. This is abundantly proved by two of his achievements. He who successfully colonised a great part of Ulster, helped to educate one who became

¹ Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Down, Connor and Dro-more, pp. 12, 13, note.

famous as the most learned man of his age. But Hamilton was probably even more learned in the subtleties of law than in the niceties of the classics. He was also a very cunning diplomatist. In that age what has been called the "new diplomacy" had not been thought of. The old diplomacy of profound secrecy, of deep laid schemes, of mining and counter-mining then held the field, and in this art James was a master.

He was the eldest son of the Rev. Hans Hamilton, then minister of Dunlop in Ayrshire, in that part of Ayrshire called Cunningham, from whence Robert, whose life we are chiefly concerned with, obtained his surname. We learn from the Hamilton MSS. that "James gave very early indications of his great aptitude for, and disposition after, learning, and so passed his time in schools until he had received all the usual parts of learning taught in that kingdom, and was within a little afterwards looked upon as one of the greatest scholars and hopeful wits in his time, insomuch that he was noticed by King James and his grave Council as one fit to negotiate among the Gentry and Nobility of Ireland for promoting the knowledge and right of King James's interest and title to the crown of England after Queen Elizabeth's death; and on this

account, was advised to write a book of his said interest, which was done to very good effect."¹

The same writer tells us that Hamilton was—"called to keep a public Latin school at Dublin," and intimates that this was done for the purpose of aiding the "negociations," probably in order to conceal them. Whatever the main object of the project may have been, Hamilton, together with his colleague Fullerton, proved their mastery of the pedagogic craft by training James Ussher, who was to become Archbishop of Armagh, and who has been regarded as the most learned man of his age. Whether Hamilton kept school for his own profit or to serve the cause of King James is not certainly known; but there can be no doubt that he was in many of the secrets of his royal master, and that he had much influence at Court.

In religion he appears to have followed the royal lead. His father—Hans Hamilton—when a young man had incurred the displeasure of the reforming party in Scotland by serving the Queen Regent (Mary of Guise). When deprived of his estate, he had studied theology and been presented with the living of Dunlop.²

¹ The Hamilton MSS., edited by T. K. Lowry, Esq., page 4.

² The Hamilton MSS., pp. 1, 2, and Notes.

As the Minister of Dunlop he was a Presbyterian, but probably not a very rigid one. It is not likely that James Hamilton imbibed from his father any very strong prejudices against Prelacy, and he was quite willing to favour it in the new plantation. At the same time, as we shall presently see, he was unwilling to persecute those who thought differently. His character is thus described by the author of the Hamilton MSS.—“As he was very learned, wise, laborious, noble (especially to strangers and scholars), so there is great ground to judge he was truly pious, as he was certainly well principled. It is true he countenanced the Episcopal course, yea, outwardly, the persecutions of that time that were against the godly (called then puritans) by the Black Oath, &c. ; yet 1. His younger education seasoned him well ; 2. He was observedly a great studier of the scripture and an enemy to profaneners ; 3. He made it his business to bring very learned and pious ministers out of Scotland, and planted all the parishes of his estate (which were six) with such ; communicated with them ; maintained them liberally ; received even their public reproofs submissively, and had secret friendly correspondence with the ministers and others that were persecuted for conscience sake ;

yea, some hid in his house when his warrants and constables were abroad looking for them.”¹

Such was the patron of Robert Cunningham; a man who had to steer a difficult, tortuous course; a man who had powerful foes and an uncertain master. That last touch reveals much. He entertained at his house the very men whom his constables, with his own warrants in their hands, were looking for. With what a grim chuckle he signed those warrants, and sent those constables about their business! Did the grave faces of the ministers in hiding relax into a broad grin at this cunning stratagem?

And now we will turn to another man who profoundly influenced Robert Cunningham, and who is a most important witness to his life and character, I mean Robert Blair.

Of all the Scotch ministers in the North of Ireland Robert Blair was the most eminent. Adair in his “Narrative” speaks of him as “that famous minister of Christ, Mr. Robert Blair, who was the first and greatest instrument for preaching of the gospel in the North of Ireland.”² Though he may have been “the greatest instrument” he was certainly not the

¹ The Hamilton MSS., pp. 31 to 35.

² A True Narrative of the Rise and Progress of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, &c., p. 1.

first. Cunningham had preached some seven years in Down before Blair arrived in 1622, and though there can be no doubt that Blair powerfully influenced Cunningham, it is quite as certain that Blair was greatly impressed by the character of the elder man.

Stewart says "that Cunningham 'like another Apostle' was instructed in the way of God more perfectly" by Blair.¹ But our best authority for Blair's opinion of Cunningham is his autobiography, a most interesting record for the publication of which we are indebted to the Wodrow Society.

Robert Blair was born at Irvine in 1593. He studied at the University of Glasgow. He tells us that in order to find time for bodily exercise "by archery, and the catchpole" without interfering with his studies, he every other day forbore one meal, and "resolved to watch at his studies every other night."² Neither healthy exercise nor sport was despised by Blair, for after he had finished his course of philosophy at the University under the discipline of his brother, Mr. William Blair, he tells us—"I took only some few days to recreate myself with my friends in the country, in hawking and hunting."³

¹ Stewart's History appended to Adair's Narrative, p. 318.

² Blair's Autobiography, p. 8.

³ Ibid, p. 9.

Having been appointed a Regent in the University of Glasgow Blair spent some years there teaching philosophy. The arbitrary manner in which the "Articles of Perth" were introduced did much to increase his strong distaste for prelacy. And, though he acted with prudence, his views on the subject became known, and gained for him the hostility of the authorities. The article which enjoined kneeling at the communion was then enforced, and caused considerable persecution; ministers being banished and imprisoned for refusal to conform to it. Something like a personal dispute with Cameron who had been appointed Principal of the University added to the difficulties of Blair's position, and he resolved to leave the University.

Two courses appeared open to him. He had received an invitation from Lord Claneboye to come to Ireland, and something like an invitation to France. He makes no secret of his personal preference for the latter, and, "landing in a place where Irishmen had been at their cups, and all things smelling of a root called ramps" (a species of wild garlic), "I was confirmed," he says, "in my prejudice against that land."¹ This unfavourable first impression

¹ Blair's Autobiography, p. 33.

was soon removed, for on his way to Bangor he says, "I met unexpectedly with so sweet a peace, and so great a joy of spirit, that I perceived the Lord welcomed me to that land. I behoved to stay a little, a mile about Carrickfergus, and lying upon the grass, to rejoice in the Lord, who was the same in Ireland which he was to me in Scotland."¹

Before describing his ordination Blair gives a brief notice "of the state of that part of Ireland." In it he confirms the description by Stewart which has already been quoted, but as it is from an eye-witness, and an earlier narrative than Stewart's, and as it contains Blair's first mention of Robert Cunningham, it may be well to introduce a portion of it here. "The parts of Scotland nearest to Ireland sent over abundance of people and cattle, that filled the counties of Ulster that lay next to the sea; and albeit amongst these, Divine Providence sent over some worthy persons for birth, education, and parts, yet the most part were such as either poverty, scandalous lives, or, at the best, adventurous seeking of better accommodation, set forward that way. The wolf and widcairn were great enemies to these first planters; but the long rested land yielded to

¹ Blair's Autobiography, p. 34.

the labourers such plentiful increase, that many followed the first essayers. Little care was had by any to plant religion. As were the people, so, for the most part, were the preachers. This was the main cause of my unwillingness to settle my abode there. Yet in the very next parish there was, before my coming, a very godly man—Mr. Robert Cunningham; and in the County of Antrim, Mr. John Ridge, a gracious man at the town of Antrim.”¹

Again he says—“My acquaintance being made with Mr. Cunningham of Holywood, was comfortable to us both, and grew to such intimacy that we frequently visited one another, and spent many hours, yea, days together, in godly conference and calling on the name of the Lord. But the case of the people through all that part of the country was most lamentable, they being drowned in ignorance, security, and sensuality.”²

When Blair arrived in Ireland Mr. John Gibson, dean of Down was in possession of the living of Bangor. He was as we have already noticed the first Protestant dean, having been appointed by the charter granted

¹ Blair's Autobiography, p. 57.

² Ibid, p. 58.

in 1609 by James I. To him probably may be ascribed the honour of being the first Protestant clergyman settled in the county. How long he had held the living of Bangor is not certainly known. Though spoken of as "the old man, Mr. Gibson" he was only sixty-three when Blair arrived, but he was then a dying man, and was desirous that Blair should succeed him. On his death, a few days afterwards, the living was offered to Blair whose preaching had given great satisfaction to the people. He made no secret of his strong antipathy to episcopacy, insisting upon it himself to the Bishop.

Echlin, whom, at a later period, Livingstone regarded as too "humorous" a man to apply to for the same purpose, was in a compromising humour, and when Blair plainly told him that "his sole ordination" was contrary to his principles, "he replied," says Blair, "both wittily and submissively, 'Whatever you account of episcopacy, yet I know you account a presbyter to have divine warrant; will you not receive ordination from Mr. Cunningham and the adjacent brethren, and let me come in amongst them in no other relation than a presbyter?' This I could not refuse, and so the matter was performed."¹

¹ Blair's Autobiography, pp. 58, 59.

Having been thus ordained Blair threw himself into the work of the ministry with intense earnestness and energy. He found much profit as well as pleasure from his friendship with Cunningham. This he very frankly confesses—"Mr. Cunningham of Holywood helped us very much, and his little parish was a good example to ours; we preaching often the one for the other. Some days we agreed also betwixt ourselves to celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper eight days in the year—four in his and four in mine; so that proficients in both did all these times communicate together."¹

The two ministers, Blair and Cunningham, were also associated together in introducing to the work of the ministry James Hamilton, a nephew of Lord Claneboye, and at that time his steward or, as Blair has it, "chamberlain." "Mr. Cunningham and I," says Blair, "put him to private essays of his gift, and being satisfied therewith, invited him to preach publicly at Bangor in his uncle's hearing, he knowing nothing till he saw him in the pulpit; for we feared he would be unwilling to part with so steadable and faithful a servant. But having heard him publicly, he put great respects upon

¹ Blair's Autobiography, p. 64.

him that same day, and shortly thereafter Mr. Hamilton entered to a charge in the holy ministry.”¹ In the account of this proceeding contained in the Hamilton MSS. we get a pleasant touch of Lady Hamilton’s wit. “After the service my Lady was pleased to compliment him thus:—‘James, I think your gown and pulpit become you very well; I will bestow the gown, and my Lord (if he will be advised by me) shall bestow the pulpit,’ both which were soon performed by his settlement in the parish of Ballywalter.”² Of James Hamilton we shall hear more presently.

The lawless dissolute condition of the early planters has been described, but a great change was about to take place. One of those remarkable revivals of religion, which usually occur, after years of neglect and slumber, when the word is once more earnestly proclaimed, began to appear in Antrim.

James Glendinning a man of unstable intellect, but a son of thunder in proclaiming the wrath of God, so startled the people in his parish of Oldstone that multitudes began to look upon themselves as lost, “and to cry out, ‘what shall we do?’”³

¹ Blair’s Autobiography, p. 65.

² Hamilton MSS., p. 74.

³ Stewart’s History, p. 316, 317.

Stewart, in his fragment of history, has left a vivid account of this revival which he appears to have remembered as a little boy. After the first panic had been somewhat allayed, the people drew together for devotional meetings. Thus "in the parish of Oldstone" "Hugh Campbell, who had fled from Scotland, for he had killed a man there," having been converted, "invited some of his honest neighbours who fought the same fight of faith to meet him at his house on the last Friday of the month, when and where beginning with a few, they spent their time in prayer, mutual edification and conference of what they found within them."¹ This monthly meeting developed into a monthly lecture. Blair thus describes it—"Mr. John Ridge a judicious and gracious minister made an overture that a monthly lecture might be set up at Antrim and invited to bear burden therein Mr. Cunningham, Mr. Hamilton, and myself. We were glad of the motion, and hearkened to it at the very first, and came prepared to preach. In the summer day four did preach, and when the day grew shorter, three. This monthly meeting thus beginning continued many years, and was a great help

¹ Stewart's History, p. 320.

to spread religion through that whole country."¹

For a considerable number of years Blair and Cunningham laboured in close association and intimacy. The affection and esteem which the younger man bore to the elder is frequently illustrated. Thus Blair says speaking of the Antrim meeting—"The next time that I was invited to the like occasion in that county, where people had a great zeal and a vehement appetite which could not be satisfied, I was sore tempted to be wholly silent, I saw such readiness in people to give great applause to instruments, and the great hazard of receiving and admitting the same. But dear Mr. Cunningham offered to chide me out of this snare, approving my jealousy, but reproving my back-drawing."²

Hopeful and prosperous as this movement appeared there were rocks ahead. Blair had serious misgivings—"Our tide"—said he—"has run so high, that there will be an ebb ; no doubt a restraint is near, our trials are hasting on."²

Much depended upon the attitude of

¹ Blair's Autobiography, p. 71.

² Ibid, p. 86.

Echlin the Bishop of Down. Blair detected a change in his disposition before he showed any open hostility. Even while he—"used to glory of the ministry in his dioceses of Down and Connor",¹ Blair complains that he—"privily lay snares; being unwilling openly to appear, the people generally approving and commending the labours and success of his servants."² The religious revival amongst the colonists was watched with jealous eyes. It was accompanied by occasional excesses. Those convulsions and contortions of the body which in a time of great religious excitement are usually observed in an ignorant populace were not uncommon.

The ministers appear to have done their utmost to suppress these disorders—"yet for all this," says Blair, "a matter of accusation was made against us, as if we had taught the necessity of a new birth by bodily pangs and throes. The instrument fitted for this accusation was Mr. Harry Leslie, who being a violent and vain-glorious man, envied the credit and respect the ministers of these two counties had of all good people."³ This Mr.

¹ Blair's Autobiography, p. 82.

² Ibid, p. 76.

³ Ibid, p. 90.

Harry Leslie afterwards succeeded Echlin in the bishopric of Down, and in that capacity we shall again meet him in this narrative. Through Leslie and a Mr. John Maxwell, afterwards Bishop of Ross and subsequently of Killala, complaints were made to Court, and Echlin, with indecent haste, on the strength of these rumours, suspended Blair, Livingstone, Dunbar, and Welsh in 1631. Blair at once appealed to Usher, the Lord Primate, who compelled Echlin "to relax that erroneous suspension." This was but a temporary relief, a letter from Court requiring an examination of the truth of Leslie's accusation having been received, a letter which Blair acknowledges was—"most just and fair,"¹—the Bishop, instead of entering upon the examination, urged the ministers to a subscription. "We in defence answered, that there was neither law nor canon in that kingdom requiring the same. Notwithstanding he, out of his cruel fury, proceeded to the sentence of deposition."² The Primate was powerless to interfere, but advised an application to the two Lord Chief Justices, who then, under his Majesty,

¹ Blair's Autobiography, p. 91.

² Ibid, p. 91.

governed the kingdom of Ireland. The Justices replied that there was no remedy but from the King himself, and upon this Blair decided to make an appeal to King Charles I.

He tells us that he had foreseen this, and the fact that he made Cunningham his only confidant in the matter shows the intimacy of their friendship. "This, and some more toil that befell me, was revealed to me ere it came to pass ; but I concealed it from all flesh, save my dear friend and brother Mr. Cunningham, who was sorry when I opened it to him, and afraid also ; but when I told him the manner, and promised to him to act nothing thereupon, but would follow the rule of the revealed will of God in His word, he acquiesced, and, in process of time, did see the events which I foretold him, even the recovery of our ministry after the compassing sea and land."¹

It is not necessary to relate the particulars of Blair's adventurous journey. The King, who was from town, hunting in "the new forest of Bewley," received him graciously, and gave him a letter addressed to Strafford. The Earl of Strafford had not yet arrived in Ireland of which country he had been so recently created Lord Deputy, but the letter

¹ Blair's Autobiography, p. 91.

though not delivered for nearly a year, "weakened the sentence by putting the matter to a new trial," so that, says Blair—"We went on teaching our people; only, *propter formam*, I went not up to the pulpit, but stood by the precentor.

"At last that magnificent Lord coming over to that government I went to Dublin and delivered his Majesty's letter, which he utterly slighted, telling me that he had his master's mind in his bosom; he reviled the church of Scotland, and menaced me to come to my right wits, and then I should be regarded."²

By the advice of Sir Andrew Stewart, the Lord Deputy, who somewhat repented his rashness, granted to the ministers a six months reprieve. This time was not extended, and the four ministers being "convened the third time" received from the Bishop of Down and Connor a sentence of deposition.

In his history of the Presbyterian church in Ireland Dr. Reid has published an account of a private conference between Blair and Echlin at the house of the Bishop, and also an account of what passed between them at the deposition from a MS. in Blair's handwriting. At the private conference an

¹ Blair's Autobiography, pp. 98, 99.

interesting allusion was made to Cunningham. "And now let me tell you, whereas ye have some pretences against Mr. Livingstone and myself, which the Lord knows are groundless, now ye are like to fall against Mr. Cunningham, against whom ye can find scarce any colour of a challenge. If ever ye put hand on his ministry, cast your cap at heaven, never to look for God's mercy."¹ This agrees with Livingstone's statement—"Yea Mr. Blair, speaking one time to the Bishop of Down said, 'You may do to me and some others as you please, but if ever you meddle with Mr. Cunningham your cup will be full.'"²

Blair thus describes the deposition scene in his Autobiography—"And being convened the third time, we received a sentence of deposition ; at which time I cited the Bishop to appear before the tribunal of Jesus Christ to answer for that wicked deed. To which he replied, 'I appeal from justice to mercy.' 'But ' said I, 'your application is like to be rejected, seeing you act against the light of your conscience.'"³

A few months after deposing the four

¹ Reid's History, &c., p. 186.

² Livingstone's Memorable Characteristics, &c., p. 325.

³ Blair's Autobiography, pp. 101, 102.

ministers Echlin died. It was perhaps natural that a connection between this death and the foregoing proceedings should be traced by those who were smarting under a sense of gross injustice. Men are too apt to regard death as a judgment upon those who differ from them, and upon those from whom they have received persecution. Many will think that it would have been more magnanimous, more truly christian to have omitted the description of the aged Bishop's death which immediately follows.

To return to Cunningham we find the old man still unmolested, but deeply sympathising with the persecution suffered by his brother ministers. Livingstone tells us how staunch a friend he was in that time of peril.

"One time when Mr. Blair and I had been summoned before the Bishop to Baltiphiphils to be deposed, and had been the night before with Mr. Cunningham, and taken our leave of him, the next day when we were going into the church of Baltiphiphils he cometh to us, whereat we wondering he said, 'All this night I have gotten no rest when I thought of that place : at my first answer no man stood with me ' ; therefore I am to stand by you.'"¹

¹ Livingstone's Memorable Characteristics, &c., p. 327.

The same writer thus describes his labours which were so soon to cease—"He was longer spared than any of the rest ; and when the rest were deposed almost every week, he preached in some of their kirks, and so with pains at home and abroad he wearied and wore out his body, which was not very strong.

He was sometimes in public preaching, to his own sense, not so assisted as usually, but even then, the sweet convoy of the matter was such, that I thought these times as edifying and refreshful as any other : but ordinarily he was borne through with a full gale, and had sometimes more sharp, piercing threatnings than any other. One time I went with him to visit a family of two gracious persons whose young child was overlaid the night before, and I observed that, beyond his usual manner, he did not comfort them, but rather urged that the Lord was debating with them some secret controversie. When I inquired at him, after we were come out, how he came to do so, he answered he knew no particular, but as he came to the house he dealt with the Lord to direct him what to say, and he could get nothing else but what he said."¹

¹ Livingstone's Memorable Characteristics, &c., p. 326.

Echlin was succeeded by a younger and more vigorous man. Henry Leslie, Dean of Down, who had already shown marked hostility to Presbyterianism, was appointed to the vacant see. He determined that every minister in his diocese should subscribe the new canons which had been recently imposed by Strafford upon the Irish Church. These rules, so recently and so arbitrarily enforced, were contrary to the practices of the most eminent ministers in the North of Ireland. As, up to this date, there had been no canons framed, these men had enjoyed a large amount of liberty. They were suddenly ordered to subscribe to rules which were opposed to what they had for many years taught their people. Leslie, it is true, made an effort to convince their reason before resorting to force. He knew that the men who steadily refused to sign were the best men in his diocese for learning and ability. They were Brice of Broad Island, Ridge of Antrim, Colwort of Oldstone, Hamilton of Ballywalter, and Cunningham of Holywood.

Edward Brice was advanced in years. Adair describes him as "an old worthy minister." He had been settled at Broad Island since the year 1613, having thus preceded Cunningham. He had been promoted by

Echlin to the Prebendary of Kilroot. John Ridge of Antrim is described as "both in doctrine and carriage, grave, calm, sweet and orderly." Blair speaks of him as "the judicious and gracious minister of Antrim." Henry Colwort was the assistant to old Mr. Brice. James Hamilton, the nephew of Lord Claneboy, we have already alluded to.

Leslie was very anxious, if possible, to win over these men, and a private conference with them having been fruitless, he offered to dispute with them in public upon the points in the canons to which they objected. They gladly accepted this offer and appointed James Hamilton as their spokesman to argue with the Bishop.

A record of this conference taken from a careful collation of several MS. copies in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh, is printed in the appendix to the 1st vol. of Dr. Reid's History of the Presbyterian church in Ireland. Though at this public dispute Hamilton was the chief speaker, it is noticeable that the MS. is headed—"Conference between the Bishop of Down, Mr. Robert Cunningham, and other Scots Ministers, August 11, 1636."

On August the 10th the Bishop preached from Matt. xviii. 17, and offered to dispute with them on the morrow. "He also

challenged Mr. Cunningham that when he gave the communion at Holywood, he abjured the people never to take the communion kneeling ; for which, if he should prosecute, he said it would bring Mr. Cunningham to greater trouble than he would be able to bring him off again. But Mr. Cunningham declared upon his honesty, that he had not done so.”¹

On the following day the debate took place in the church at Belfast. It began with some fencing about matters which neither party regarded as of chief importance. These matters were the imperfect translation of the Hebrew scriptures contained in the Book of Common Prayer, the direction to read portions of the Apocrypha, and the omission of the two books of Chronicles, Solomon’s Song, and the Revelation from the lectionary. Upon all these points the Bishop was willing to yield. They were to be free to read from the best translation they could find, to omit all reading from the Apocrypha, and as for the book of the Revelation the Bishop exclaimed —“ With my blessing both read it and preach upon it, all the days of your life. Are ye now satisfied ? ”²

¹ Reid’s History, Vol. I, p. 524.

² Ibid, Vol. I, p. 528.

Then that vexed question of the lawfulness of kneeling at the Communion was brought up, and the real battle began. It had lasted for a considerable time when "the Lord Claneboy, the Lord Chichester, and the Bishop of Derry, with Captain Chichester and others, came into the church." ¹

Bramhall, the Bishop of Derry, began to interfere in a violent blustering way—"My Lord of Down, In good faith I commend your charity, but not your wisdom, in suffering such a prattling jack to talk so openly against the orders of the church. My Lord, it is more than ye can justify yourself in to the state." ²

Soon afterwards he petulantly exclaimed to Hamilton, "worship thou the devil, if thou wilt." ³ Hamilton took no notice of these unmannerly interruptions, and though when Bramhall made an observation that deserved an answer he replied to it, yet "he still directed his speech to the Bishop of Down, who was before him, and not to the Bishop of Derry, who was behind his back." The question which they debated, whether it be right to receive the sacrament sitting or kneeling seems a somewhat trivial one, but it must be

¹ Reid's History, &c., vol. I., p. 532.

² Ibid, pp. 532-3.

³ Ibid, p. 533.

remembered that the kneeling to which these men objected was *enforced* kneeling. The principle upon which they acted was the grand principle that no rite or ceremony ought to be enforced in the church as essential to Communion which had not been clearly commanded by the example and precept of Christ.

Hamilton thus closed his argument before the adjournment of the conference. "Yet I am persuaded that these words, 'Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind,' stands good to the world's end. And further I argue thus:—That which Christ avoided in all the sacraments in the Old and New Testaments, that we should avoid. But all adoration before the elements in all the sacraments of the Old and New Testaments, Christ did avoid; therefore, all adoration before the sacraments we should avoid."¹

The conference was then adjourned, and, Bramhall who with true ecclesiastical instinct perceived the danger of free inquiry and open discussion, having persuaded Leslie that it was unlawful, it was not resumed on the following day, August 12th. On that day the Bishop briefly addressed the ministers, and demanded

¹ Reid's History, Vol. I, p. 542.

to know why sentence should not be pronounced against them.

Mr. Ridge first replied very briefly repeating his refusal to subscribe. James Hamilton then spoke continuing the debate about kneeling. The Bishop then—"read the five several sentences of perpetual silence within his diocese," and after the sentence was read Mr. Cunningham spoke to this effect :—

"I have now lived these twenty years amongst you in this kingdom, serving the Lord in his holy ministry ; and thought so to have spent out the rest of my days (which cannot be long, for my body is very craized) in the same employment. My doctrine and life, for that time, are known to most who are here present. I appeal to all their consciences if they can say anything against me in either of them. Yea, I ever kept me close to the commission of my Lord ; but now I am required to receive impositions upon my ministry which are against my conscience. I rather lay down my ministry at the feet of my Lord and Saviour Christ, of whom I did receive it, than to live with an evil conscience at the free liberty of it."

At these words most of them who were present declared the grief of their hearts by their sad countenance, and divers burst out

into weeping, not being able to contain themselves.

But the Bishop replied to this purpose :—
 “Mr. Cunningham, I confess your life and doctrine hath both been good ; but I must say to you that which was said to a certain man at Rome, who was to be put to death for a mutiny. Some pleaded for his life, alleging that he had done good service to the commonwealth, and could do more afterwards. But one of the Counsel replied : ‘*Non opus est reipublicæ eo cive, qui parere nescit.*’ And so say I to you, the church hath no need of those who cannot tell how to obey.”¹ With this reply to Cunningham, and not waiting to hear anything from Mr. Colwart, the Bishop speedily arose and went away.

The two elder men of this little company were soon called to a higher ministry than that in which they had been silenced by an earthly decree. Even before the sentence could be executed Brice passed away. Cunningham went to Irvine or Irwin, a town on the river of the same name, and in the district from which his surname is derived. In Camden’s *Britannia* the place is described as “a Borough with a port, so choked up with

¹ Reid, vol. I, 201-2,

banks of sand, and so shallow that it is only capable of small vessels."

Here for a few months the aged minister made his abode. He was "called home," as Livingstone happily expresses it, on March 29th, 1637. Three accounts of his end, though substantially the same, differ in some details. These are by Row, Adair, and Livingstone. Livingstone, who was present, gives the fullest account, and the others are probably simply taken from his. Livingstone says—"I was with him when he died at Irvine in the year 1637, at which time, beside many other gracious expressions, he said one time, 'I see Christ standing over death's head, and saying, deal warily with my servant ; loose now this pin, now that, for this tabernacle must be set up again.'

"When the ministers of the Presbyterie came to see him, he exhorted them earnestly to be faithful to God and to his people, and to oppose the Service Book which at that time was urged, and the office of Bishops—He said, 'The Bishops have taken away from me my ministrie, yea my life, for my ministrie was dearer to me than my life.'

¹ Camden's *Britannia*, vol. II, p. 1205.

A "little before his death, his wife¹ sitting on the side of the low bed whereon he lay, and her hand in his, he did by prayer recommend the whole church, the work of God in Ireland, the parish of Holywood, his brethren in the ministry, his children ; and in end said, ' And last O Lord, I recommend to thee this gentlewoman who is no more my wife ' ; and with that saying, he softly loosed his hand from hers, and gently thrust her hand a little from him, at which both she and others presently burst out weeping, which he by gracious expressions laboured to allay, but I have forgotten the particulars."²

Row, in his life of Robert Blair, a continuation of the Autobiography, relates the same circumstance, adding—" And after a while he slept in the Lord, and was buried in the burial place at the kirk of Irvine." His friend Robert Blair wrote his epitaph, which,

¹ Isabel Montgomerie, daughter to Hugh Montgomerie, laird of Busbie. Blair for his second wife, married a sister of Isabel—Katherine Montgomerie—William Row in his supplement to Blair's Life thus speaks of the family. " This gentleman "—Hugh Montgomerie—" had many daughters, one married to holy Mr. Cunningham of Holywood, another to Mr. Hamilton, minister at Killileagh in Ireland, and Ballantrae in Scotland. Her father was out of the house of Eglinton, her mother out of the house of Glencairn."—Life of Robert Blair, p. 136.

² Livingstone's Memorable Characteristics, &c., p. 326.

says Row, is engraven on his grave stone in the kirk yard of Irvine. As the testimony of one who knew him well, it is not without value.

Hic Cunninghami recubat Roberti
Corpus. O qualis genius latebat,
Quamque divinus fragili involutus,
Pulvere in isto !

Acrius nemo intonuit superbis ;
Nemo dejectos magis erigebat ;
Sed Dei laudes celebrando vicit
Seque aliosque.¹

“Acrius nemo intonuit superbis,” confirms the description of his preaching by Livingstone—“and he had sometimes more sharp piercing threatnings than any other.” The gentleness of his disposition appears to have been combined with a healthy capacity for moral indignation, and there was undoubtedly a strain of severity in his character, but—“Nemo dejectos magis erigebat.”

¹ Life of Blair, p. 148.

Here rests, of Robert Cunningham
The mortal frame ;
O what a mind
Divine, in fragile earth enshrined !
None sharper threatening the proud ;
More cheering none to souls that bowed,
In praising God he did excel
Not others only, but himself as well.

The tombstone, which contained the epitaph by Blair, was removed, and in 1824 a stone with a plain English prose inscription was erected in place of it. This inscription states that—"He was eminently distinguished for meekness, and patience, and zeal in his ministry." But his best epitaph is the testimony of his friend Livingstone. That spontaneous expression of honest admiration is worth more than any laboured inscription—"He was the one man to my discerning of all that ever I saw, who resembled most the meekness of Jesus Christ in all his whole carriage, and was so far revered by all, even the most wicked, that he was oft troubled with that scripture 'Woe to you when all men speak well of you.'" Here, one would suppose, this brief narrative of the life of Robert Cunningham might end. All that was mortal of this minister of Christ lay in the burial ground at Irvine; but though dead to the kind offices of his friends, he was not, it appears, dead to the malice of his persecutors. Some weeks after the closing scene at Irvine the dead man was summoned to appear before the High Commissioner at Dublin, and for failure to appear was fined twenty pounds sterling.

In the petition against so stupid and

unjust a sentence, framed by his widow, Isabel Montgomerie,¹ we learn that she was living with her eight fatherless children, when, "notwithstanding sure information" of her husband's death having been given to the court, "all the cows and horses which did remain for maintainance" of her and her children, "amounting far above the sum of twenty pounds sterling," were seized and driven away, until the widow found surety under the pain of forty pounds sterling to pay the said sum at a certain day, or else to produce an acquittance of the same from the High Commission Court, "which," says the petition, "did cost your suppliant more charges nor my small means could well afford, and yet I am not freed of the danger thereof." The spirit of persecution has caused some cruel acts, but surely it can never have caused one more stupidly brutal than this infliction of a heavy fine on the widow of a dead man because some weeks after his death he had failed to appear before a court.

But even this was not all, for we read in the petition—"As also because of your suppliant's firm adherence to the Covenant of Scotland, warrants did lately issue out for my

¹ Life of Robert Blair, p. 149, note.

apprehension, and forced me to forsake the place of mine abode, together with my fatherless children, and I am now constrained to live in this kingdom without certain residence, separate from my children and all means of sustentation."

Whether this cruel wrong was ever righted we know not ; but with the bitter intolerant feeling, of which it was an expression, it is pleasant to contrast the esteem in which the memory of Robert Cunningham is held by the various denominations of the place where he ministered. Three of the Protestant churches in the town of Holywood are proud to connect their history with his life.

The Protestant Episcopal Church is the successor and the representative of the church in which Cunningham ministered for so many years, and which finally silenced him for nonconformity. No history of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Holywood could be written without a prominent place being given to Robert Cunningham, who, as far as is known, was the first Protestant minister in Holywood. Those Presbyterians who adhere to the Westminster Confession, represented by two large and flourishing churches, regard Cunningham as their founder in Holywood. And the First, or Old Presbyterian Church of

Holywood, connected with the Non-subscribing Presbytery of Antrim, places at the head of the long roll of its ministers the name of Robert Cunningham.

We may add that the true spiritual descendants of this servant of God are those, of every sect, who in trial and difficulty show the same truth to conviction regardless of consequences provided that honour be untarnished and "conscience as the noon-tide clear."

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